

Grace maintains Zonolite insulation not harmful

J.W.R. Grace is continuing to maintain that Zonolite insulation is not harmful.

"There is no credible reason to believe that ZAI (Zonolite asbestos insulation) has ever caused an asbestos-related disease in anyone who has used it in his/her home," said William Corcoran, vice president of public relations and regulatory affairs. "William Corcoran, chairman of the Environmental Protection Committee," he concluded.

Corcoran is attempting to prevent the EPA from declaring a health emergency in Libby, where the Federal agency is proposing to remove Zonolite insulation, asbestos and other materials.

The company, which owns, mined and processed the vermiculite to which Zonolite is added, Libby officials recommended that an independent panel of experts review the EPA's data before a health emergency is declared.

Grace bases its statement that the insulation is "harmless" on "analyses" which show that nearly all of the asbestos was removed during the removal and thermal expansion of vermiculite. Given this fact, it is reasonable to expect that evidence of the product will not result in hazardous levels of asbestos fibers.

Corcoran pointed out, "Medical and epidemiological data demonstrate the lack of a health hazard from environmental exposure to the very small amount of asbestos that may be contained in products such as ZAI."

The Grace vice president said the company recognizes that there is occurrence of asbestos-related disease in Libby.

"We do not dispute that work-

ers employed in the mining and milling operations at Libby were exposed to extremely high concentrations of asbestos,"

William Corcoran, Grace vice-president

Corcoran wrote. "There is also no dispute that a number of those workers contracted pulmonary disease as a result of their long-term exposure to high concentrations of asbestos."

"What is in dispute is the extent of asbestos disease in Libby and the source of the exposure."

Corcoran said reports from the Agency for Toxic Substances Registry "exonerated" all as causes of disease. He said ATSDR concluded that there was no higher risk for people with vermiculite in insulation in their homes.

Earlier this year, Grace officials made the same argument

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before a group of EPA representatives in Washington, D.C. [2] "Grace is unaware of any person or organization who has ever developed a likelihood that efforts to combat asbestos-related disease solely on this decision to Libby will prove to a result of exposure to asbestos insulation," Corcoran continued in his letter to Whisman.

Corcoran said Grace and its experts questioned the validity of the EPA Region 3 study of health claims and risks of asbestos. The company called the EPA's data on asbestos concentrations "grossly exaggerated and distorted."

Corcoran questioned the type and the size of fibers counted by the EPA as well as the protocols used in collecting samples.

The company executive said